

## 1.3 GOD'S GENERAL REVELATION

Creation proclaims the Creator! And creation is not a whispering witness! "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows His handiwork" (Psalm 19:1). The "Book of Nature," as it is often called, shouts aloud the majesty and power and wisdom of the One who made the heavens by His Word and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth (Psalm 33:6). Referred to as **General** Revelation because it is revealed generally to all mankind, it also leaves all mankind without excuse for his guilt in suppressing that revealed truth by means of his sin against God. Although all men know God through the things He has made, that knowledge is not sufficient to save them from sin and the wrath of God. In order to be saved, we need more than generally revealed truth about God...we need the righteousness of God as it is revealed in the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Romans 1:16-17)!

### Creation Proclaims the Creator!

The Bible describes the lifeless idols of this world as nothing more than the work of men's hands. Consider the words of the psalmist:

#### Psalm 115:5-7

<sup>5</sup> They have mouths, but they do not speak;  
Eyes they have, but they do not see;  
<sup>6</sup> They have ears, but they do not hear;  
Noses they have, but they do not smell;  
<sup>7</sup> They have hands, but they do not handle;  
Feet they have, but they do not walk;  
Nor do they mutter through their throat.

However, in great contrast with the dead and voiceless idols of this world, the true and living God **speaks!** God communicates, decrees, commands, instructs, promises, and reveals. He reveals Himself to us through gracious acts of voluntary self-disclosure for the benefit of those made in His image and for the glory of His own name.

The first of those gracious, revelatory self-disclosures through an act of divine speech is creation. "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth" (Psalm 33:6). "For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast" (Psalm 33:9). Now all creation proclaims the Creator! "From the brightness of the heavens we may collect that the Creator is light; their vastness of extent bespeaks his immensity; their height his transcendency and sovereignty, their influence upon this earth his dominion, and providence, and universal beneficence: and all declare his almighty power, by which they were at first made, and continue to this day according to the ordinances that were then settled." (Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*)

#### Psalm 19:1-3

<sup>1</sup> The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork.  
<sup>2</sup> Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge.  
<sup>3</sup> There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard.

Creation was designed by God as a "glorious theater;" a "magnificent theater of heaven and earth replenished with numberless wonders" in which we see God's glory on display in daily life (John Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.5.8). It's through creation that "our fingers feel and our nostrils smell; our palates taste His virtues that excel; He shows Himself to our eyes, and talks to our ears, in the ordered motions of the spangled spheres." (Charles Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*)

### THE ESSENTIALS OF BAPTIST THEOLOGY

#### 1.1 WHAT IS A REFORMED BAPTIST?

#### 1.2 THE FIVE SOLAS OF THE REFORMATION

##### THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

#### 1.3 GOD'S GENERAL REVELATION

#### 1.4 GOD'S SPECIAL REVELATION

#### 1.5 THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE

#### 1.6 THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

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#### 1.11 WITHOUT BODY, PARTS, OR PASSIONS

#### 1.12 THE COMMUNICABLE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

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#### 1.14 GOD'S ORIGINATING WORK: CREATION

#### 1.15 GOD'S CONTINUING WORK: PROVIDENCE

#### 1.16 THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

#### 1.17 PREDESTINATION

#### 1.18 THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE: UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION

##### THE DOCTRINE OF MAN

#### 1.19 MAN IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

#### 1.20 THE FALL OF MAN

#### 1.21 THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE: TOTAL DEPRAVITY

#### 1.22 JUDGMENT AND THE PENALTY FOR SIN

#### 1.23 FREE WILL

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#### 1.24 COVENANT THEOLOGY: THE COVENANT OF REDEMPTION

#### 1.25 COVENANT THEOLOGY: THE COVENANT OF WORKS

#### 1.26 COVENANT THEOLOGY: THE COVENANT OF GRACE

##### CHRISTOLOGY

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#### 1.28 THE HUMANITY OF CHRIST

#### 1.29 CHRIST THE MEDIATOR: PROPHET

#### 1.30 CHRIST THE MEDIATOR: PRIEST

#### 1.31 CHRIST THE MEDIATOR: KING

#### 1.32 THE NECESSITY OF THE ATONEMENT

#### 1.33 THE NATURE OF THE ATONEMENT

#### 1.34 DOCTRINES OF GRACE: THE EXTENT OF THE ATONEMENT

##### REDEMPTION APPLIED

#### 1.35 THE PERSON AND WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

#### 1.36 THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE: EFFECTUAL GRACE

#### 1.37 REGENERATION

#### 1.38 CONVERSION: SAVING FAITH

#### 1.39 CONVERSION: REPENTANCE

#### 1.40 JUSTIFICATION

#### 1.41 IMPUTATION

#### 1.42 UNION WITH CHRIST

#### 1.43 ADOPTION

#### 1.44 SANCTIFICATION

#### 1.45 THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE: PRESERVATION OF THE SAINTS

#### 1.46 GOOD WORKS

#### 1.47 THE CHRISTIAN'S ASSURANCE

#### 1.48 GLORIFICATION

##### ADDITIONAL LESSONS

#### 1.49 LORDSHIP SALVATION VS. EASY-BELIEFISM

#### 1.50 COUNTING THE COST

#### 1.51 THE LAW OF GOD

#### 1.52 THE GOSPEL

#### 1.53 THE FEAR OF GOD

#### 1.54 ESCHATOLOGY

The Scriptures teach us about God's revelation in three basic theological categories:

1. General Revelation: revealed generally to all mankind through God's works in creation from the cosmos to the conscience.
2. Special Revelation: "so called because it is not granted to all mankind through natural means, but to select people through supernatural means, who then must tell it to others" (Joel Beeke, *Reformed Systematic Theology*). In special revelation, God reveals Himself *verbally*.
3. Applied Revelation: special revelation *applied* to the individual through a supernatural work of God involving effectual calling, regeneration, and sanctification.

General revelation is acknowledged throughout the Bible. We see it clearly addressed in the words of Paul from Romans 1:18-20:

Romans 1:18-20

<sup>18</sup> For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, <sup>19</sup> because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. <sup>20</sup> For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse"

Through the clear and general revelation of Himself in creation to all mankind made in His image, God renders all men without excuse for their guilt before the bar of God's justice, on the basis of man's sinful suppression of that revealed truth through the means of his own unrighteousness.

Notice the way in which Paul speaks of general revelation in the text. He begins with the general revelation of God's righteous wrath in v. 18 which "is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." This wrath is not impersonal or indiscriminate. It is wrath that comes from our God who resides in heaven and it is directed against the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. This is because although they knew God through general revelation (v. 19), they did not glorify Him as God, nor were they thankful (v. 21).

Rather than speaking of this wrath as associated with the future outpouring of God's wrath in judgment at the end of the age, Paul refers to this wrath as being *presently* revealed by God. This general revelation of God's wrath is overtly evident in the world today. We see it revealed in death, disease, disaster, destruction, despair, decay, and danger to name a few. Paul specifically mentions this wrath in terms of God's abandonment of sinners to their ungodly lusts in the verses that follow our text:

**Romans 1:24-28** (*emphasis* mine)

<sup>24</sup> Therefore *God also gave them up* to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, <sup>25</sup> who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

<sup>26</sup> For this reason *God gave them up* to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. <sup>27</sup> Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of

their error which was due.

<sup>28</sup> And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting

In addition to the general revelation of God's wrath in Romans 1:18, we also see a general revelation of the Divine Nature in Romans 1:19. Although there are things about God that we cannot know through observing His works in creation, what can be known is exceedingly clear. Through observing the visible creation, we can perceive or understand much about the invisible God...even His eternal power and Godhead! This overwhelmingly visible, exceedingly clear, and graciously sufficient general revelation renders all men without excuse for the guilt they incur for refusing to glorify Him as God and be thankful (v. 21). In reality, there simply is no such thing as an atheist...only aggressive truth suppressors!

Paul then references a third form of general revelation where God has revealed Himself by creating man in His image. God's moral image, imprinted on the heart of man at creation and then defaced by man at the fall, is now observed in part through the operations of our conscience.

#### **Romans 2:14-16**

<sup>14</sup> for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, <sup>15</sup> who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves *their* thoughts accusing or else excusing *them*) <sup>16</sup> in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.

This moral image given by God as a "natural" gift to all men is distinct from that law which is supernaturally written on the heart of man in regeneration. In that supernatural work, the Spirit of God produces a *new creation*. The one who has been "born again" of God's Spirit then *delights* to do His will and *rejoices* in righteousness.

Apart from that regenerating work of God's Spirit, what is the universal response of the natural man to God's general revelation? All men suppress the truth of God by means of their sin (Romans 1:18). How do they suppress the truth?

#### **Romans 1:21-23**

<sup>21</sup> because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup> Professing to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup> and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.

To acknowledge God is to simultaneously acknowledge your accountability to Him as your creator. Men would rather fight to suppress that truth than give up their perceived autonomy and submit to Him as their rightful Lord. The list of foolish schemes imagined by foolish men is long and infamous. Ultimately there is simply no excuse for this brazen rebellion.

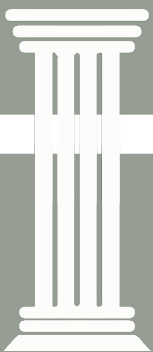
Because the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all this ungodliness and unrighteousness of men (v. 18), Paul says, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ" (v.

16). The gospel is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes! It is through this special revelation of God in the preaching of the gospel that the righteousness of God is revealed. That righteousness is the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ, offered freely as a gift of God's grace, and given or imputed through faith. Creation proclaims the Creator, but creation is powerless to save. General Revelation leaves us without excuse. Trust in Christ alone to save you from sin and from the wrath of God.

No humble dress, no fervent prayer;  
No lifted hands, no tearful song;  
No recitation of the truth can justify a single wrong.

My righteousness is Jesus' life;  
My debt was paid by Jesus' death;  
My weary load was borne by Him and He alone can give me rest.

## FURTHER READING



## THE 1689 BAPTIST CONFESSION OF FAITH

Joel R. Beeke and Paul M. Smalley, *Revelation and God: Reformed Systematic Theology, Volume 1* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2019)

Scott R. Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading* (London: T&T Clark International, 2011)

### 4.1 Of Creation

In the beginning it pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for the manifestation of the glory of his eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, to create or make the world, and all things therein, whether visible or invisible, in the space of six days, and all very good. (John 1:2, 3; Hebrews 1:2; Job 26:13; Romans 1:20; Colossians 1:16; Genesis 1:31)

### 1.1 Of the Holy Scriptures

The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience, although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God and his will which is necessary unto salvation.

## STUDY FOR YOURSELF



What are the three basic theological categories we see in the Bible for God's revelation of Himself?

Define "general revelation" in your own words.

What are the three forms of general revelation that we see described in the Bible?

How are all people rendered without excuse for their guilt by general revelation?

Make note of specific ways in which people suppress the truth of God in unrighteousness.

Make note of specific ways in which creation reveals God's eternal power and Godhead.

Explain the revealed wrath of God's abandonment.

What are the implications of general revelation for someone who never hears the gospel?

### PRIMARY TEXT

#### Romans 1:18-23

<sup>18</sup> For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness <sup>19</sup> because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. <sup>20</sup> For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, <sup>21</sup> because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup> Professing to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup> and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.



### ADD YOUR OWN TEXT

### CATECHISM CORNER

#### Q. 2: Ought everyone to believe there is a God?

A: Everyone ought to believe there is a God; and it is their great sin and folly who do not.

Hebrews 11:6, Psalm 14:1

#### Q. 3: How may we know there is a God?

A: The light of nature in man and the works of God plainly declare there is a God; but His Word and Spirit only do it fully and effectually for the salvation of sinners.

Romans 1:19-20, Psalm 19:1-3, Acts 17:24

1 Corinthians 2:10, 2 Timothy 3:15-16

### SCRIPTURE MEMORIZATION

#### Psalm 19:1-6

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. <sup>2</sup> Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. <sup>3</sup>

There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. <sup>4</sup> Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them He has set a tabernacle for the sun, <sup>5</sup> Which is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoices like a strong man to run its race. <sup>6</sup> Its rising is from one end of heaven, and its circuit to the other end; and there is nothing hidden from its heat.

